

Chinese express long-suppressed anger

by UPI

BEIJING - Thousands in China are belatedly able to express openly their grief over a 1994 incident in which 288 children died in a fire.

The Times of London reported on Internet campaigners in China who only recently were able to expose the truth -- that the children perished because they were ordered to take their seats in a theater so Communist party officials could escape the fire first.

The fire occurred in a theater in the country's Xinjiang province, where schoolchildren were watching a play. Survivors of the blaze told the Times the fire broke out when lanterns on the stage either short-circuited or fell over, engulfing the area within minutes.

Survivors said they remembered someone shouting "Everyone keep quiet. Don't move. Let the leaders go first" when the fire began. Once the political leaders had escaped, it was too late.

After the fire was put out, rescue workers pulled out the corpses of 288 children and 36 adults.

The massive tragedy, known to many in China as the "12/8/94 incident," received scarce media coverage at the time, apparently in an attempt to protect the government.

However, 12 years later, a reporter for China Central Television posted a previously censored documentary about the fire on his Web site, prompting a long-suppressed outpouring of grief and rage.

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